



3 1761 04300 2377

OTAKAR BŘEZINA
A STUDY IN CZECH LITERATURE

by

P. Selver

—
1921

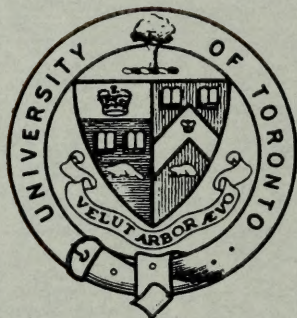
OXFORD: BASIL BLACKWELL

N: 4 STATIONERS' HALL COURT, E. C. 4.

BRIEF

PG

075062



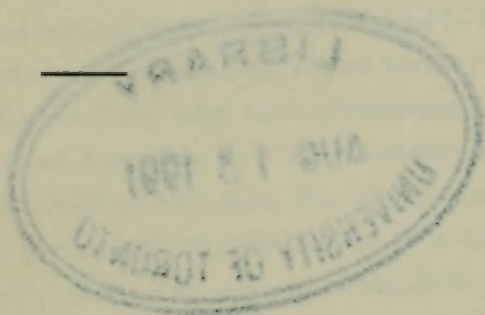
Purchased From
Funds Donated
by
**The Andrew W. Mellon
Foundation**

OTAKAR BŘEZINA

A STUDY IN CZECH LITERATURE

BY

P. SELVER



1921

OXFORD: BASIL BLACKWELL

LONDON: 4 STATIONERS' HALL COURT, E. C. 4.



P R E F A C E

On several occasions during the past few years I have published translations from Březina in various English periodicals, while my "Anthology of Slavonic Literature" and "Modern Czech Poetry" both contain representative extracts from his works. But the circumstances under which these translations appeared precluded the possibility of providing an adequate survey of Březina's artistic achievement as a whole. The purpose of the following essay is to provide such a concise but systematic introduction to Březina's work. In order to obtain an independent impression of the subject, I have, as far as possible, avoided studying the numerous Czech commentaries on Březina. I must, however, state my indebtedness to the volume published by Dr. Josef Staněk and Dr. Jaroslav Durych in 1918 on the occasion of Březina's fiftieth birthday. It contains a quantity of biographical and critical material which ought to be made accessible to all who are interested in Březina. I must further express my gratitude to Messrs. Kegan Paul who have permitted me to reprint a number of translations from the two above-mentioned volumes. With regard to the translated extracts, the rhyme and metre of the original have been preserved, except where it is otherwise indicated. The bibliography does not aim at completeness, but includes only those books which I have actually consulted.

London, February 1921.

P. Selver.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The latest editions of Březina's works are as follows: —

P o e m s : Básnické Spisy (Tajemné dálky, Svítání na západě, Větry od pólů, Stavitelé chrámů, Ruce). In one volume, Manes, Prague, 1920.

P r o s e : Prosy I. (3rd edition, Odkaz, Prague 1919).

S e l e c t i o n s : Nová česká poesie, ed. by Dr. Arne Novák. (J. R. Vilímek, Prague, 1908).

Česká Lyra, ed. by Fr. S. Procházka. (Unie, Prague, 2nd., enlarged edition, 1913).

Výbor básní Otakara Březiny. (Pestrá knihovna, No. 26, Alois Hynek, Prague, 1910.)

Březina, Sova, Dyk. Výbor z lyriky. (Světla No. 1., ed. by Miloš Hýsek, Jan Laichter, Prague, 1912.)

Úvod do studia Otakara Březiny, ed. by Dr. František Tichý. (R. Promberger, Olomouc, 1919.)

Výbor básní a pros Otakara Březiny. Kruh četby No. 4, ed. by Emanuel Lešehrad. (Alois Srdce, Prague, 1920.)

The handbook referred to in the preface is entitled:

Otakar Březina 1868 — 1918, by Dr. Josef Staněk and Dr. Jaroslav Durych (Nákladem tiskařské a vydavatelské společnosti, Přerov 1918.)

I

Otakar Březina was born in the year 1868 at Počátky, a small town in southern Bohemia. His real name is Václav Jebavý, the now more familiar pseudonym having been adopted for literary purposes. (An equally striking example of pseudonymous fame in Czech literature is that of the great Jaroslav Vrchlický, who in private life was Emil Frida.) Březina, a school-teacher by profession, has published five volumes of poems, — "Secret Distances" (1895), "Dawning in the West" (1896), "Polar Winds" (1897), "Temple Builders" (1899), and "The Hands" (1901), — together with a series of prose essays, "The Music of the Springs" (1903).

Březina's most subjective writing is contained in his first volume. Thus, the opening poem, which significantly begins with the words: "O strength of ecstasies and dreams..." provides such autobiographical lines as:

"Scantly in my life I breathed of friendship's fragrance"

— — — — —
 "I ciphered life's account in solitary session,
 And to the flower-bed of my dreamings I retreated:
 More in the thought than in the deed was my transgression,
 And phantoms I adored and blurred forebodings greeted."

— — — — —
 "My springtide was a mournful, elegiac song"

— — — — —
 "My memories are colourless and parched"

— — — — —
 "Poverty's acid savour did I taste betimes"

— — — — —
while in another poem, after referring to his mother who:

“... passed through life as in sad atonement;
Her day was void of fragrance, colours, blossoms, lustre.
Only parched fruit of life with an ashen savour
... she plucked from the tree of time”

he speaks of himself thus:

“I am the pale blossom of thy chill blood...
— — — — —

Life's harsh savour was imprinted on my lips by thy kiss,
And sorrow has remained as thine heritage in my soul.
— — — — —

And my path is mournful, even as thine before;
My day is void of fragrance, colours, blossoms, lustre;
Only parched fruit of life with an ashen savour
... do I pluck from the tree of time.”*

In “The Secret Distances” the poet seeks a refuge from the sorrows of reality. But the collection is not altogether homogeneous in character. On the one hand there are a number of poems which mark the ending rather than the beginning of a period in Březina's inner development. This applies in particular to those verses which testify to moods of excessive introspection, resulting in such images as: —

“In steely, contracting circle the horizon narrowed... Gloom ripened.
Darksome brotherhoods of forests I beheld, bowing earthwards,

*Alternately rhyming alexandrines in the original.

As in a chorus of prayers for the dead. The coverlet of heaven was
lowered
Above my head, as if crushed and stretched down by twilight".
(Anniversary).

Such a passage as this produces the impression that the poet's flight from reality has distorted and blurred his scale of values, which, however, in his later volumes were to undergo a gradual adjustment.

On the other hand, there are poems which may be regarded as the true starting-point of Březina's mental growth. In them the poet looks forward rather than backward, and indicates, although often in a rudimentary manner, the speculative and objective tendencies of his subsequent work. Thus, in the „Evening Prayer" he expresses his desire to attain clairvoyant powers which will enable him to penetrate mysteries:

"Holy one, descend upon the dim lamp of my gaze,
Pour fresh oil in it, and enkindle comprehension;
With the ray of my glances let me behold, a myriad miles removed,
The dusk of ancient ocean-forests and summits of ecstasy;
How crystal is joined unto crystal within the bosom of rocks,
How lustre of colours gushes through fabric of blossoms,
How life, which slumbered in the bosom of matter,
Is roused to unending bloom and eddy and ferment of existence."*

This suggests an outlook in sharp contrast to poems which reveal a preoccupation with death and suffering: —

"At bedsides, in dusk of forebodings, many a time, I know,
Before thy conquering gaze has my gaze been laid low.

* Alternately rhyming alexandrines in the original.

To far-hidden, unknown cities, pale and bewildered it went
In gloom and polar nights with journeyings mute and forspent.

At bed-sides, in dusk of forebodings, many a time I know,
Before thy conquering gaze has my gaze been laid low.

As a sleep-walker lured from his bed, pallid, fettered and dumb,
My dream do I follow, and me an Unknown's promptings benumb.

And in wearied hands of my days, aquiver before me arise
Lights of funeral torches enkindled by thine eyes."

(Gaze of Death).

Moreover, this early collection includes two poems, "Fragrances of my soul's gardens" and "Grief", whose form and style give a very definite foretaste of the plastic rhythm and pregnant imagery abounding in subsequent volumes. The former contains these typical lines: —

"Fragrances of my soul's gardens,

Fragrances upraised from flower-beds concealed by a myriad
nights!

Fragrances of palm-groves and expanses of lilies in bloom,
Potions that soothe in moments of expiring twilight,
Gentle waft of cooling breath upon the sweat-covered brow
Borne from shores of silent rivers, which flow into bays of Death.
O, salutation soaring on the wind from distant oases,
O, resonant hymn of invisible waterfalls
Behind bluish mountain-ranges of the promised land
O, fragrances of unapproachable isles behind misty drifts
Of radiance, colours and shapes —

Beneath your clouds have ranged throngs of my perished dreams
Like processions of wearied pilgrims unto miraculous wellheads
Upon sacred hillocks and unto cathedrals !"

— — — — —

The following is from "Grief" : —

"In my soul I have grief of one fettered to a bed,
When victorious summons of chimes is aquiver from the top-
most tower . . .

— — — — —

In my soul I have grief of a captive upon the day of Maytide
festivities,

Grief of a lover by the church-portal upon the day of espousal,

— — — — —

Grief of one weakened by searching for dreams at earliest
azure of daybreaks,

Grief of gazes wearied by vain tarrying before departure,
Grief of withering countenances, which never were flushed
with kisses,

Grief of a stranger, stirred by artless embrace of a Yule-tide
song,

Grief of the musical instrument, hung above the couch of a
dead master,

Grief of blossoms which none plucked and dedicated in vases
upon the altar,

Grief of radiance which burned away in a lonely lamp
And which none placed into the bed-chamber of lovers . . ."

— — — — —

These two poems represent, as it were, the first wider illumina-

tion of the darkness, the first signs of thaw in the frozen depths.

The concluding poem of the volume, "Art", expresses Březina's lofty conception of the poet's calling, and a humble interpretation of his own creative powers :

— — — — —
"Beneath a vault aloof, upon a tiny shrine,
Where o'er a marble city towers thy metal fane,
Eternal One, durst I, marred with blood-lusts of mine,
My mass for Thee ordain?

"And soak the bread of life in wine of rapture, on
The altar table, which conceals in hallowed stead
'Neath roses of my dreams and lights of orison
The relics of thy dead?

"Or will thy body yield marvel of blood, perchance,
Vine-like, in golden goblet, heavy for my weak hands,
And with angelic lustre wilt thou light my glance,
Born amid twilight lands?"
— — — — —

While in the following lines he shows himself already conscious of the artist's eternal unrest and travail, the "grievous stir of the unborn" :

"Upon my pyre of days I bid Thee : Torture, burn ;
In sorrow's prison-house blanch Thou my face as snow."

Březina's poetical technique, as exhibited in "The Secret Distances" may here be briefly discussed. Out of the thirty poems in the

book, thirteen are in alexandrines, whose austere and melodious cadences are but imperfectly conveyed in the passages quoted from "Art". It is especially difficult to reproduce the effect of the sonorous feminine rhymes, in which Březina draws fully upon the ample resources of Czech word-structure. Such combinations, for instance, as *nessál, — klesal, nezaplálo — málo, vstala — jala*, embody verbal forms which have no analogy in English. This metrical regularity has been largely superseded by less rigid rhythmical schemes, and Březina's last two volumes contain no alexandrines at all. As far as style is concerned, the abundant imagery which is so typical of Březina's diction, is already present. A parallel may here be drawn between the development of Březina's ideas and the medium in which he expresses them. His rapid successions of metaphors are not so effective in the sombre verses of "The Secret Distances" as in the maturer poems, with whose warmer flexibility of movement and profounder range of thought they blend far more organically.

At the beginning of his career Březina's name was associated with the group of poets, to whose official organ, the "Modern Review", he was a frequent contributor. In its deeper aspects, however, Březina's personality has little in common with the "Modern Review" poets. The melancholy temper of "The Secret Distances", for example, bears only a superficial resemblance to the communings with death, horror and perversity, in which J. Karásek ze Lvovic, a prominent representative of this group, has so freely indulged, and in Březina's later poems the divergency becomes still more pronounced.

II.

The idea underlying the "Dawning in the West" is elaborated in the title-poem of the volume. Březina refers to the time when :

"... the swelter of noon is long ago ended.

Wearied the blood-drunken dream, and in purer accents it plays.

Our prison's glimmering bars with crackle of fire are rended..."

The poet's conception of death has undergone a change, which is implied in the symbolic use of the word "dawning". This modified conception of death is still further expounded in "Wine of the Strong", as follows: —

"... our death shall be as death of the purified. Like to a passing
From rooms sated with fragrances into a church on Palm Sunday.
Like to embarking upon a vessel amid flutter of banners and playing
of music;

Like to departure of soldiery unto conquered regions, when garlands
are flung to them from the windows.

Like to the joyous response of the choir to the priest's words, be-
dimmed with mystery..."

But Březina's second volume, like the earlier collection, is not uniform in texture, and there are still a few subjective and retrospective poems which recall the tone of the "Secret Distances". The continuity of the two volumes is, indeed, obvious. Thus, the opening poem, "Morning Prayer", at once suggests a comparison with the "Evening Prayer", from which a quotation has already been given, and the contrast between the two poems is significant. The "Evening Prayer" is in alexandrines, while the free rhythm of the "Morning Prayer" is an admirable example of Březina's rhetorical dithyrambs, which become so specially effective in the later stages of his development. Such a passage as the following: —

“Unto my voice grant music well-beloved of gleaners, like noontide
chimings,

And unto my song silvery cadences of streams amid fields, in season
of thirst.

Grant that my steps may arouse from weariness joyful expectation
of brethren,

And that unto my greeting hasteners may respond graciously.

Grant that even in foes' wrathful glances it may be mine to revere
radiance of thy secret,

And unto adversities they dispatch against me I smilingly declare:
Ye my toilers!

But if I merit not that my wings be upraised by strength of my vision,
Let my penitence be upraised by strength yearned for by my frailty.
Give my soul courage of silence when thou hast declared thyself
in tokens,

And unto my gardens roses enough, when arises the season for
twining of garlands.

Make that my truth be like unto a missal,

That each, even the rejected and dying, find his prayer therein.

And if eternal sunshine be mirrored in my word, may it cast ecstasy's
gladsome flush upon brethren

And their yearning's blossoms be turned towards eternal focus of
ripening.

Vouchsafe that in my smile's radiance pollen from my fields may fall
upon neighbouring seed-plots,

And let breath of my sorrow congeal into crystals of balm for them
grown infirm with seeking.

Fill my solitude's muteness with wing-rustle of brotherly spirits,

And let moments of my joyousness as fragrant rain quiver above
sleepless couches,

Vouchsafe that my ponderings be as springtide winds, which carry
rhythm unto coming song-tunes,
And as tempests which force the farer to turn back from pathways
of death."

"... deadly stillnesses, wherein throb hammers of thine hidden
workshops,

are typical of Březina's maturer diction and terminology. They suggest, too, that the poet's earlier prayer is already being fulfilled.

"Flash of my coming hours illumined this moment in dreams
And bloomed in my festive halls with every lustre ablaze,
My coming springtides and hidden graces rippled in tuneful streams,
I was dazed by lips, with breath that beguiles, with laughter that
gleams,
And eyes where awaited me muteness of rapture glowed there with
yearning gaze.

But vainly I strode where quivered, in rhythms that dumbfound,
Life's chant. The shadow of one before me and after me wended,
Flitting from hall unto hall, bright blaze at its coming was
drowned,

Mirrors grew dim, yearning trembled and music's conquering sound
As if thrust into lowliest octaves with silent anguish was blended.

O my soul, whence came it? And how many centuries has it passed
Haply through souls of my forefathers, ere unto me it came?
On how many marriage-tables as a requiem-cloth was it cast?
On how many rose-hued smiles came its chill and earthen blast?
And in how many lamps did it blanch amid salt and essence of
flame?"

Březina introduces his characteristic theory of an inherited and unatoned curse by which life is haunted and complete happiness rendered impossible.

It has already been pointed out that the "Dawning in the West", compared with the "Secret Distances", marks a decided modification in Březina's technique and diction. The tendency towards less restricted verse forms is evident, and scarcely one quarter of the poems in the second volume are in alexandrines.

III

This tendency towards freedom of form becomes most pronounced in "Polar Winds", and it is accompanied by a corresponding organic development of the poetical style. The majestic element in Březina's work is no longer confined to a few isolated examples, but the whole book is pervaded by a mature wealth of imagery and imaginative power which show the poet's clairvoyant and pro-

phetical faculties gaining an ever greater momentum. More and more he reaches altitudes of comprehension, in terms of which no personal sorrow can become articulate. As in previous volumes there is the same diversity of subject-matter, but each type of theme is treated on an equally ample scale. A few instances must here suffice. Thus, the problem of human sorrow here becomes the subject of a poem entitled "Martyrs", in which various categories of suffering humanity are depicted with wonderfully penetrative insight. The introductory lines may be quoted as an example of the manner in which Březina suggests the whole visionary atmosphere of the poem :

"Earth breathed into nights of the happy, fragrance of vineyards
was borne amid their dreams,
Age-old time-pieces in cities struck midnight, forests and waters
slumbered ;
Only souls of the disinherited watched mournfully
By their blood-red fires."

This dream-like decorative setting is a device which now becomes more frequent in Březina's poetry. Thus, the poem entitled "The Town" opens thus :

"In dusk of strange light I beheld a town. And the sun
Pallid and void of radiance hung above it,
Naught more than a star amid stars."

Perhaps the supreme example occurs in the "Song of Sun, Earth, Waters and Secret of Fire", a striking invocation of the elements, in which scientific knowledge is harmoniously blended with a strong poetic phantasy :

And haunts thine every movement amid thy dance through spaces
of worlds!

Vessel, enchanted within a single circle, thou floatest through ages,
And hours, perplexingly silent mariners,
Guard thy numberless strangers,
Yearningly from the deck gazing into distances
In treachery musing on liberation;
Age upon age in a single circle through ages thou floatest,
But billows thou flingest in a myriad circles surge up to the marges
Of dawning years.

Waters! Mirrors of heights, where age-long star-images have faded,
Treachorous, ye that have kissed life with myriad kisses,
And captivity of earth ye concealed with beauty, and ye at noon-
tides have been

Bath and wine of the sun, and thousandfold heaved by its ardour,
Afresh and afresh ye returned for solace of earth!
From roses and violets and dew ye wove fragrant garb of mornings..."

— — — — —

Here the resources of Březina's imagery produce effects both of rhetorical impetus and lyric delicacy.

The altruistic and humanitarian phases of Březina's poetry are expressed in the "Prayer for Enemies", while "Summer Solstice" is an example of a lyrical intermezzo, strangely coloured, however by Březina's symbolism. The dainty beauty and tripping measure of these lines form an effective contrast to the more epic breadth and philosophic depth which Březina's poetry has now acquired. It will be seen that Březina's poetry as a whole forms a synthesis of varying elements. This diversity should be emphasised, as, owing perhaps to his strongly individual style, Březina is sometimes

represented as a poet whose range is narrow. This opinion results in a misleading attempt to reduce each of his volumes to a distinctive formula, although, as it has already been demonstrated, they are by no means of a homogeneous character.

IV.

On the whole, the "Temple Builders" may be regarded as less transcendental in character than the preceding volume. The title-poem opens with one of those preparatory strophes, familiar from the "Polar Winds" :

"We saw uncounted multitudes, Through overcast majesty of things
Sadly they ranged. Souls knew not one the other, as if each from
a different world
After secret wreckage had sought refuge upon earth.
And dreamt of their losses."

Then follows a passage rich in beautiful lyric cadences :

"...solitudes amid magical forests, above which the sun
Like a bird with golden wings unendingly furrowed spaces ;
Through all creation soared its song exalting life in accord,
Miraculous creative morning-tides in gardens of earth and ocean-
valleys,
In azure prairies of earth and water :

It sank athirst ocean-wards, and quaffing thereof aroused tempests,
In amethyst caverns beneath sunset glaciers it sought slumber amid
nests of mountain-roses
And its visible dream, dalliance of myriad kindred suns,

Dancing to rhythms of mournful music, arose through infinities
Radiant with love. Night set blossoms telling of their balm-potence
And ecstasy which slumbers in grapes and the poppy . . ."

In the course of the poem, Březina presents a vision of mankind,
embodying those who :

"... dreamed of cities, which dominated regions. Of toil's delight,
Hammers' festive chiming, taming of fire, transports of contest,
Journey-signals, peril's delights, pride of bestowers,
Daring of hands which fling secret nets over nations,
And of words which fall like garlands of pitch upon hostile cities,

Of eagles' pride upon lonely mountains, whose whirling pinions
In swiftness of flight seem unmovingly rigid as if metal-wrought,
With potency of glances piercing twilit creation star-like.

Of rapture in destruction, cyclones' triumphal journeys over
lowlands,
Forest-conflagrations, icy polar whirlwinds, of elements' demoniac
laughter,
That with clanking of sundered chains flashingly plunge into chaos.

Of seekers' tragic thirsting, a chase with secrets for quarry
On paths of unnumbered worlds, merging into a single world,
Perplexedly coursing the ages, lurking on ancient burial-places . . ."

the "disinherited" who as

"... ants, swarming from crannies,
Slaves creeping through life as in forbidden gardens,
Passed mutely around us. Dreamless their wearied souls . . ."

and the "elect", the "Temple Builders", who

"... alone of all,

Knew one the other by tokens. Like promise of other heaven and
other earth

They saw horror and splendour of things. In fulness of unnumbered
shapes

They felt first bracing of thy creative breath,
Asparkle from all highest tracks of beauty..."

By this classification of human beings, the poem becomes part of a series, the other chief components of which are "Martyrs" in the "Polar Winds", "Prophets" in the "Temple Builders" and "The Frenzied" in Březina's last volume of poems. The poem "Prophets" is an apotheosis of those who

"Unto cities, whose towers and palaces shall one day quiver
In earthquake...

Shall arrive, unperceived, thine envoys,
Conquerors of thy kingdom."

and of whom Březina says: —

"And most secret thoughts of their own, terrified by omniscience,
Shall they hear above them chanting in starry firmaments,
Beneath them in fiery and secret muteness amid depths of earth,
Antiphonies of lustre and night-time.

Of thee do they speak and thy glory,
Of the curse resting on the brotherhood of souls
And sundering speech of the builders; and their love

From age unto age roves above earth,
Like summer from settlements, whither vertical sunrays endlessly
beat.

New fruit is yielded by trees of the earth,
Engrafted shoots from their secret gardens;
But their hopes, apt for such lofty flights and song-tunes
Build their nests on a level with earth,
Like nightingales.

Too slowly earth revolves for them, too slowly do mornings arise,
And too long do noontides repose in shadow of trees
Amid reapers.
They crave to soar with speed of light through the ages,
To possess a thousand hearts with whose blood to nourish their
ecstasy...

All souls to gladden with wine which yielded them such festive
Sorrow and rapture."

The messianic tone of these verses forms a contrast to the poem
entitled "With Death converse the Sleepers . . .", which opens thus:

"Lo, the hour wherein the grievously sick even more are afflicted
And love achieves omniscience.
Over all oceans and continents a thousand voices soar unto us,
Wherewith as with psalms of a single choir brethren to brethren
respond.

Sunset-blaze ended, with death converse the sleepers, and our cities
Are hushed now. Earth is a lost shore amid an unbounded ocean
And above it a chilled firmament, canopy of an opened basalt cavern,

Which fire has parched up. Only thine oceans' voices lament therein
And their surf-ridden waves beat upon it through tragical stillness
And mockingly sparkle from gloom with drift of delicate gold,
Washed from islands of countless distant worlds
Beyond reach. And we here thy captives!"

The insoluble riddles of earthly suffering are enunciated with elegiac symbolism:

"And if our suffering craves secret justice,
Wherefore speaks it not clearly to our souls? Who wandered before us,
And graved signs in the bark of thine ancient forest-trees,
Which we comprehend not? And concealed wolves' dens with blossom-sprays?
Wherefore sound prophets' words like hallucinations
Unto our ears? . . ."

The poet lapses into a desponding realisation that life is still beset by sorrow. But this mood of despondency is induced by his share in the collective sorrow of creation, not by a personal emotion resulting from isolated self-analysis: --

" . . . We know that a curse has lighted on all.
Birds of the heights
And reptiles of earth tremble before mightier ones. Age-long war
Is waged by nations of insects. Even in plants' purest domain
Is contest and decay, wherein fragrant moonbeam delicacy
Succumbs to onslaught of barbaric power. With simmer of contest
Life bubbles in its ardour . . ."

"Grief of Matter" and "World of Plants" in this volume form

examples of Březina's personification of the inanimate, and fusion of science with poetry. Thus: —

"World of plants. Motionless the trees dream of their journeys
Through age-long change of guise. Saps of earth blissfully trickled
to them from darkness
And sweet to the sucklings was radiant milk of the sun.
... In depths blazes

Memory of fire ...

Though all manner of insects may come.
Even them awaits here toil, and both the loathliest
And the loveliest are equally greeted by moon-pallor
And passionate flush of blossoms. — O my soul, afar from us
Life flows here ...
As in ferment it simmered through fire of tertiary ages. In its mirror
Beheld morn and eve their colours' glory, secret reflex
Of eternal loveliness ..."

Finally, the monologue "I am like to a tree in blossom" represents the more lyrical aspect of Březina's work. It is as melodious as a dance-measure, irregular but not arbitrary in rhythm, and very effectively conveys the idea of earth become articulate: —

"I am like to a tree in blossom, chiming with insects and bees;
I am calm, I am gay;
Blood is a sunrising, where amid fire bathes the day become young;
I have scattered fragrance in corridors of light, where my lovers pass
on their way
And every secret of night-time in woman's lap I have flung.
But jealous, I will not, when I slumber by night, foredone with embraces of spring,

That thou shouldest pine for my sisters' ethereal beauty, with the
dalliance-lure of its call:
Amyriad years have I stored up my riches, e'en as the dower of a king,
And unto them who crave after naught do I bestow it all.

Theirs is my love with the goad of its fierceness,
Languor with calm of the tomb,
Depth of my gaze, from which glitters
Star-clusters' eddy of doom,
Draught of my moments, where light of eternity
Flickers in utter defeat,
And swoon of caresses,
Evil and sweet..."

The close is altogether in keeping with the opening stanzas: —
"For curse of a secret guilt and time blend in my laughter with
sobbing throes,
And my weeping that echoes with blitheness of radiance
Intones a hope of Return."

In these final lines recurs the motive elaborated in the "Legend of Secret Guilt."

V.

In "The Hands" Březina's art attains its noblest and most impressive utterance. This collection of poems radiates brilliance of imagery and warmth of tone. It is pervaded by the spirit of those humanitarian ideals which in previous volumes are indicated in detached poems and passages. The whole of Březina's philosophy of human brotherhood and the continuity of human effort and existence is

concentrated in the title-poem. Again, a suggestive introductory passage: —

"In dazzling whiteness of light lay the earth, like a book of songs
Before our eyes. And thus did we sing: —

Lo, in this moment the hands of myriads are locked in magical chain
That begirds all continents, forests, mountain-ranges
And across silent realms of all oceans is outstretched unto brethren:
In cities that loom darkly up from deep horizons, tragical altars of
sacrifice ;

And where the sun, mystical lamp, suspended low from azure vaults
Bloodily smoulders in smoke, circling over stations and cathedrals;
Palaces of kings and armies, council-chambers, prisons, amphitheatres,
And where the ardour of a myriad hearts in the twilit heaven of
spirits

Flares up enkindled in feverish tempest of sweetness and death . . ."

After a succession of dazzling imagery evoking various manifestations of human existence, the poem concludes by repeating and amplifying the idea contained in the symbolic title: —

"And our hands, enfolded amid a magical chain of countless hands,
Sway in the current of brotherly strength, which laps upon them
from afar,
Ever more potent from pressure of ages. Unbroken waves
Of sorrow, daring, madness, bliss, enchantment and love
Suffuse our bodies . . .
We feel how our chain, seized by hands of higher beings
Enfolds itself in a new chain unto all starry spaces
And encompasses worlds . . ."

Because of hidden spring-tides of harmony
Set in the woven fabric of all things
Like butterfly-wings of the opalescent azure at evening,
Asparkle with the scaliness of stars,
Blissful is life ..."

concluding with the messianic idea of which Březina's optimistic philosophy is the direct outcome: —

"Because of the approaching advent of the radiant mortal of mystery
Who alone among myriad brethren that shall be and have been,
Conqueror over space,
Shall change the earth from pole unto pole after thy sacred will
And by thought that from submissive suns
Has learnt deftness and dances and song-tunes,
Shall sit in thy secret council
Among princes of the cosmos, —
Blissful is life!"

It has been pointed out that Březina's previous volumes are not strictly homogeneous, and the same applies to "The Hands". Even at this stage there are lapses into moods when the poet recalls that evil has not yet been overcome. Thus, in the sombre stanzas entitled "The Swelter": —

"But amid clatter of goblets the princes of night celebrate their
festival!
And thy song is hushed as a river gurgling beyond mountains ..."

and in such poems as "Woe of Man", and "Death Vigil" there are still traces of the inner struggle through which the poet has passed.

But although the sense of suffering has not been eliminated, it is the spirit of "The Hands" and the "Roundelay of Hearts" which here predominates. The "Prologue", with its glimpses of clarified perspectives, is typical: —

"Moments of glory I had, when my soul in majesty of its fetterless
flight

Above centuries uprose in an eddying cyclone of light,
Age-old herbage it flung aside, and the husbandman on time's field
In July-tide of his gaze let ripen new treasures that corn-ears yield.

And when my harvest-laden garner blazed, I chanted of beauty of fire,
Of a palace of dreams, starward plunged thousandfold spire upon
spire;

And when it likewise blazed, and a wind around me mockingly
fluttered.

Chanting and muteness I mastered, and never an outcry of anguish
I uttered.

Earth beauteous, as never before through ages, since it has flown
Whirling in dimness of space, by bloom of my dreams I was shown,
I beheld arrays of giant-like springtides, suns darkened amid their
torches' gleam,

Myriads of earthly springtides were spanned to their chariot's team.

I saw kingly summers upon beds of purple splendour repose,
Lulled by tuneful eventides, by strains that from delicate harps arose,
Moonlit nights in pleasancess of women, dazing vintages of love,
And enchantment of dying, most blissful, with stars inflamed above.

Gardens of winter I saw, boughs with crystalline blossoms arrayed,

Like newly enkindled lustres with rainbow dalliance still they
swayed;
Like ice-palms on windows of mystery, they were illumined with
frosty sheen,
And drawn nigh, set asparkle and opened, as though gardens of cos-
mos they had been.

But I likewise saw earth sorrowful, as she was since ancient days,
With bitter smile conversing to man, in the distance was plunged her
anguished gaze;
Earth in the universe one of the poorest amid her sisters around,
Isle on an ocean of stillness, that except death no peace has found.

In clouds of time saw lightnings, like apocalypse-script with fiery
power,
A Caesar's beck unto bondsmen, arenas with blood, like roses
in flower,
Gaze of man, earth's pride and will, hardened by strife, by victories
rended,
Gaze of woman, earth's delight, wherein reproaches and yearnings
are blended.

And all glory of my dream, splendour of night with its flaming brands,
Did I forget when I beheld my brethren with their wearied hands,
Bloodstained, clenched in anger, and while a surging ocean laughed
Sundered by buffets of oars, when they clung to an overladen craft.

Clatter of mystical fetters amid my dreaming stirred,
And in its age-old cadence music of myriad hearts I heard,
Of myriad hearts, like stars one from the other removed, estranged:
One for the other secretly yearning, and deep amid frosty twilight
ranged.

In mocking pathos we thundered the epic of earths
Buried amid ages. With fire's glowing leavens
We fermented into ethereal glaciers of cloudy mountain-ranges,
Above the golden sun's lair at his setting,
Like airy mirages, recoiling through distances of cosmos
From a giant world more resplendent.
The rainbow we conjured in weeping of waterfalls and beneath
oceans' starry mirrors
We concealed age-old contest of our unnumbered creatures
Mute and relentless, illumining the black depths with lightning-
flashes.

But conquerors read our hidden wisdom from their heights
Out of the silvery chart blazing to them from depths, as lines upon
night's hand
And as on a coin, the inscription's glittering imprint, proclaiming
the value;
Unto them speak life's joyful secrets in our thousand pathways,
Which from all mountain-peaks pour to a single sea
And from multiple strains of our springs, river-courses and oceans,
They hear the chant of a single kindly power,
Which in numberless changes seeks earth's true countenance..."

Reference has already been made to "The Frenzied" in connection with the "Martyrs", "Temple Builders" and "Prophets". "The Frenzied" are the "oath-bound witnesses of the secret", the "step-children of earth", to whom they have knelt

"... in prayer of thanksgiving while countless railed upon thee
And we have wept where countless returned thanks unto thee;

Our voices were asparkle like the sun, when myriads grew mute in
terror,
And when hearts and chimes rang out in triumph at return of
victors,
Our lips, prophetic, were locked in an anguished spasm of silence.

Princes of earth and bondsmen, scourged to the blood,
Assembled as brethren in the cathedral of our devotions ;
Upon all branded brows we bestowed solace of kisses,
We fathomed heaviest dreams of earth, like the sigh of a mother,
And where our brethren turned away in horror, we still felt love.

— — — — —

From our morn to our eve we have passed only through future ages ;
When to our brethren we seemed to be nearest, we had departed
the farthest
Though poorest, yet from precious lustres, marble and metals of
mystery
We built up temples to glory of the Eternal, and restored splendour
unto the Word,
Though humble, we lorded it over souls in the name of thy mysti-
cal power.

And though we have lived in unnumbered lives, and have bloomed
in glow of all blossoms,
And by the sun of our love as a cloud have raised the whole uni-
verse into azure of phantasy,
And have bowed ourselves down to beasts in the yoke, as to our
brethren of enchantment,
And have felt bliss of all conceptions, and in our bosoms grievous
stir of the unborn,
And in our hearts fire of all hearts — we remained in solitude..."

Here Březina forcefully depicts the paradoxical position of those who cannot conform to the spirit of the age in which they live. This idea is developed most concisely in the following stanza: —

"Only the dead and brethren approaching from future ages
Have responded to joyful tidings of our covenant:
Amid thirsting of our will . . .
Our dearest have grown mute and blenched, and grace of our glances
They received with dread as perilous kisses of those smitten with
grievous sickness."

This is the tragic isolation of those who indulge in messianic dreams :
" . . . they declared us traitors of earth . . .

When we dreamed . . .

Of man, gentle herdsman of elements, prince of mystical strength . . .
Of welding of all myriads unto the One Man of redemption,
Steersman of a spirit-earth, who shall float to shores of thy secrets,
In track of thy holy winds spanning sails woven by ages,
And in new language, potent as language of angels, pure as language
of children,
He shall grant names to blossoms of thine invisible gardens.

But not even in glowing mistiness of remotest worlds
Have we discovered peace; we have envied the dead their mute
wisdom;

Above every region of beauty whither our gaze has reached in
conquest,

Tokens of thy sovereign sway in all infinities
Before us in dark menace loom up as citadels guarded by loftiest
spirits.

From azure of a thousand azures flashed up in gigantic orbits.

Tier upon tier of thy structure, ever more clarified, with boundless
perspective;
From star unto star, as if thronging to new abodes, in thy will's
igniting June-tide,
Hierarchies of spirits arise, a mystical bee-swarm from a single hive
Intent on their sweet task with a riddling song of melancholy . . ."

The lyrical pieces which have been referred to from Březina's
previous volumes can be matched here by such an exquisite poem
as "Pure Morning" : —

"When into the garden at morning-tide we entered weary with
many dreams,
The whole of earth, like to our souls, we saw abloom in fiery gleams;
And we to winds, to waters, plants, birds, bees a question sent:
What secret one this bygone night along our garden went?

The sand, a golden changeling, lured where'er the sacred marks
were shed,
The waters murmured healingly, as set astir by angel tread,
Each breath had strength of life, as though for many glowing days,
And awe of new-engendered things was seen in every gaze.

Our grievous secrets' burden we as will of thine did not resist,
A missive that by humble lips, ere rending of the seal, is kissed;
E'en at our gates the ambushed foe whom slumber overcame
As thine o'erwearied messenger we greeted with acclaim.

In havoc-ridden solitudes, that by the demon sprites are scoured,
As though it were a lily-bed, our cravings' tender garden flowered,

* The rhyme-scheme of the original has not been preserved.

And women who most fervid were, most comely and most sweet,
As though our stainless sisters in their radiance we did greet."

"Responses", a dialogue embodying two opposed conceptions of human existence, also calls for quotation in full:

We are curse-laden: even amid our yearnings' loftiest flight
We by burden of earth are vanquished, plunged into our blood's
dim night.

"Ye are potent and deathless; and in your souls where secrets
abound,
Suns and spring-tides and vintages numberless are found"

In silence of cosmos, in midst of stars, that are flecked with blood
as they wane,
We are cut off in solitude, as by watch-fires of foes in a chain.

"Armour of heavily-armed is your burden: unto contest ye
Are summoned, that ye therein may set all earth-born creatures free."

Upon the riven breast of the vanquished we strive to kneel,
And even when we yearn to love, no love we feel, no love we feel.

"Hardened are ye like fruit unripened; but in the blaze
Of a secret summer ye ripen, your brethren's embraces to praise"

Gladness is sunshine beheld in a dream: on awakening it is dulled;
Sorrow has thousands of eyes, and never in slumber is utterly
lulled . . .

"With myriads in secret brotherhood ye are tied
And only in gladness of myriads will gladness of yours abide"

To floating islands upon a furrow of fragrance we float . . .
We float and the islands float onward, and keep us ever remote . . .

"Blindfold are ye with deceit that your kingly glances wield:
Islands of radiance that bloom in your souls, before you they have
revealed".

The second couplet of this poem epitomizes in a characteristic manner the idea of the soul which Březina has attained after a memorable process of artistic and ethical development.

V.

The distinguishing features of Březina's poetry, its rich cadences, its brilliant imagery, the profound insight exhibited in its contents, recur in his prose works. "The Music of the Springs" contains eleven essays which originally appeared in various periodicals between the years 1897 and 1903.

The medium of prose, by liberating the writer from the exigencies of metrical form, enhances the relative importance of the subject-matter. Thus, in these essays Březina is able to amplify the ideas and germs of ideas scattered throughout his poetry, in particular, his ethical and altruistic convictions, his faith in the ultimate triumph of justice and in the perfectibility of existence. But this collection of essays is not merely a supplement to Březina's poetry; it has an independent value of its own, and, perhaps more than any other of his books, it reveals him as an original thinker with a definite system of constructive ideas.

"The Music of the Springs" forms a series of meditations in prose rather than essays. The firm, hard outlines, the logical sequence of the modern essay are here replaced by aphorisms and reflections, set down beside each other more in the discursive manner of the early essayists. In his prose it may be said that Březina is thinking aloud, just as in his poetry he is often, as it were, dreaming aloud. The apparent absence of a preconceived plan produces the effect of improvisation, prompted however, by a creative impulse whose intensity remains undiminished to the end.

Březina's prose works are a quintessence of pregnant and concentrated thought. Phrase after phrase provides the material from which whole poems could be composed. The accompanying extracts will serve to indicate the eloquent and suggestive beauty of Březina's prose style. The essays represented are all contained in "The Music of the Springs", with the exception of "The Present Age", which forms part of "Hidden Annals", a series not yet issued in its completed form.

"Righteousness, the radiant wind of purest and supremest atmospheres which are breathed by the Holy, arises through the wafting of the same commanding gesture by which stars are enkindled and quenched. Its omnipresence circumscribes and develops the structure of the cosmos. It is a statute which guards the marvellous blossom of life, that it may fill all its own peculiar lines of beauty with a fragrant texture. Its secret encompasses life with countless symbols. All that in reeling of weakness ventures upon escape from its plan, perishes consumed by frost and darkness. It goes as a gardener through gardens of all the ages. Its breath penetrates all times and all spaces, and is sweet and potent as an eternal music existing everywhere. Even to those who are not conscious of this music, because they were born amid it and it incessantly accompanies them,

it is wafted suddenly in an unexpected perception amid moments of joy and love as a song of sublime hopes, and at an instant of monitory clearness after sin as lightnings advancing with concerted purpose from behind the horizon."

"The Highest Righteousness"

"To comprehend fully the statutes of righteousness means infinitely more than to comprehend the statutes which uphold the architecture of the universe. It means more than a mere passing over to a higher life. Our earth is only a garden of symbols and of open, unending perspectives. Of the radiances by which godly unity blazes into the soul, righteousness is one of the most perplexing among the perplexing. Upon places illumined by comprehension of it, an eternal springtide flashes towards us, things glitter in a lustre of perfection, the grace of unutterable goodness breathes with the harmonious rhythms of worlds, and all earth's hidden fountain-heads murmur and open themselves to thirsty lips and planets."

"The Highest Righteousness"

"Beneath the rough voice with which we respond to the questionings of our days, is concealed the delicate, inaudible voice of the soul. The waves, which quiver at its breathing, are purer waves of another world. Only in loftiest outcries of love, in deepest silences of yearning and pondering, and in those fateful moments unexpectedly arriving, can it quiver through heavy denseness of waves in our atmospheres, and thus reveal itself. It can be so sweet that all fervour of songs uttered through the ages is, beside it, but a mute gesture in the twilight, amid which escapes the play of lips and glances darkened by interference of deepest light waves. For its words are fragile, and like light are capable of arousing uncounted tinges in a single colour. A thousand pasts and futures form its range, where

it spreads freely and joyously. It converses with friendly souls in the distance."

"Fateful Moments"

"It was these moments of awareness, mustard-seeds of knowledge, from which developed earth's thought-herbages. From them arose new guises in mankind's annals. From souls separated by hundreds and thousands of years, there resounded words amplifying each other mutually in a single text, the solution of which will also be its ending, when ages have elapsed. But those to whom they resounded, although separated by all oceans and glaciers, and by time, deepest of oceans, were born on an equal meridian of another sun, which showered upon them the blessing of its radiance in a single shadowless noontide. The thinker arose roused from the heavy sleep resting upon thoughts and objects, and a morningtide of new truth blazed up before him in ethereal, fragrant flames, in which birds fearlessly sang. Prophets went forth from their wildernesses, and about their forms, wasted with fasts and visionings, their words flung kingly mantles woven from lightning-flashes, which dazed with their blows the extended hands of the watchmen dispatched to seize them."

"Fateful Moments"

"Only in these moments have the hands of painters discovered the most eloquent lines full of mystery, and colours mixed amid invisible moisture of another light have gained brilliance of hectic rapture which pours into souls the unrest of beauty, of that thirst for the unknown, and one of earth's most delicate and potent sorrows. Amid them have resounded into creative stillness the hallucinations of symphonies never heard upon earth, which wearily seized by earthly tones, arouse a nostalgia for life purer than life of our days, and cause souls to comprehend that their annals do not begin with birth nor end with death. But vainly do we seek to en-

force these moments by an outcry of passion, vainly do we watch to meet with the radiant presence of the soul amid secrets of blood and adventures of the senses; wide-opened glances, artificially incited, see not into their twilight. All manifestations of the soul, even the most grievous, are in the end accompanied by solemn calm of loftiest hopes and submissive repose upon faith in Justice. They are always revealed when there is need of them, in secret, inaccessible to conjectures of reason. Like stars of our firmament and stars of another heaven they appear, by refraction of mystical radiance, upon another spot than where in reality they are. Their lustre gleams above the horizon before they have arisen, and still flares after they have set."

"Fateful Moments"

"For nothing can circumscribe the soul but the uncircumscribed. In sublime prodigality it is lavish with the possessions which it has acquired, but jealously it guards its hopes for the unattainable. Not even death is strong enough to hypnotise it into inactivity and to quench within it that thirst for acquiring, that blind infatuation with the untold wealth in the treasury of the universe dizzily vaulted to all infinities, where worlds, like precious stones, flash forth a radiance in which they were arrayed long ago. The sun has fashioned its earthly glance, heaviness its strength, sorrow its love, the impossible its courage. The greater the endeavour, the sweeter and lovelier its flush, the swifter and more musical its breath. Captor of motion, it loves all that soars, — time, all that drags away what hinders its flight, — splendid space. Even its loftiest yearnings, like song-birds, nourish themselves amid flight."

"Perspectives"

"The freest and strongest manifestations of the soul, in those rare and beautiful moments upon this earth, when they reveal themselves to awe-struck gazes, have a feverishly blazing eagerness, a shift-

ing billow of fire, glittering as if combed by serried winds. To those who are unaccustomed to this spectacle (so unforeseen is it in the poor and cold zones of our time), there seems something ruthlessly egoistic in this glowing flight, whose beauty is too dazzling for glances not long aroused from slumber. The concentrated intentness of creators seems heedlessness to their brethren who do not comprehend that, where the soul builds, moments have the value of centuries. But how would it otherwise be possible to merge all potencies amid those solemnly overwhelming creative contacts, which penetrate matter as though with ethereal fingers, set it astir with an inner network of relationships, and mould it into new unions? Rebuke not sternness of the builder's gaze, when it rests anxiously upon the foundations of a building, through which myriads yet unborn shall pass! As if love, multiform as fire, were not capable of all manifestations! As if the glow of its flames decreased, when it becomes invisible to the sight!"

"Perspectives"

"The soul never builds only for itself. In the spots where it constructs, space is filled with myriads of hands, uplifted from all ages, which meet in the pressure of an eternal brotherly sign, and pass on their labour one to the other. It is a fervid and overwhelming activity, from which memory returns mute and terrified, set grievously aquiver by beating of hammers, dazzled by white furnace-like abysses, by clatter of implements in secret workshops, by behests soaring amid the glow, feverish with breath of myriads, by processions of those arriving and departing, and by the songs of them who are already building on high. In those regions there is nothing that accords with the attenuated earthly standards of selfishness and the circumspection, which locks up its hives, that they may yield no sweetness for the lips of brethren."

"Perspectives"

"Sharers in the secret building of a higher world, we do not survey more than is needed for the range at which we stand. To gaze upward is punished by vertigo, to gaze downward by a fall. Our thoughts perplexedly flee from the eddy of eternal thought, snatching into its depths everything that approaches it. And yet afresh and afresh they are allured to it, afresh and afresh they draw near it and accustom their glances to the long contemplation of dazzlement. Limbs benumbed amid the chillness of our age with its poor, cryptogamous vegetation, with its springtide of lichen and moss, gain freshness of pliancy in those sweet and perilous approaches. The eye slowly adapts itself to behold, amid the flushing upon faces of brethren, the red reflex from a single furnace, to which myriads are summoned as toilers. The will, which in present beings trembles as it is borne along by the eddying of blood, and is sundered by all winds like a pillar of smoke from an inner fire, becomes aware that its aim is to flash forth in a fiery cluster of rays, whose shafts, braced upwards, the alternation of winds cannot move. Uncertainties grow mute, for they recognise that there exists an absolute truth, and that all thoughts like blossoms, fragrant, sweet, venomous and balm-laden, grow beside the pathway leading to it. That there is a moral statute and that man is destined to interpret its secrets by age-long sorrows. That every profound comprehension of life casts light upon the mystical twilight of death. That there are unbounded riches of joy, blossoming like gardens opened unto all, and vainly shedding their bloom throughout whole ages, since none approaches them." "Perspectives"

"Fear of death is always a testimony that we have not succeeded in comprehending the beauty of life. But the gates leading to the beauty of life are guarded, and will never open to one arriving alone. Not until thousands stand before them will they open." "Perspectives"

"Twofold labour grows beneath our hands ; labour for time and labour for eternity. The labour for eternity is accompanied by a secret wonder and glory, two testimonies which are given us, that we may not doubt of our immortality." "Perspectives"

"But although knowledge of the world's beauty in a single vision is granted only to rapture of the elect, and only to them because they possess courage enough, in the midst of so many griefs, to share it for the solace of their brethren, the firmament of radiance never closes above the earth. For myriads of years has the earth revolved, but it has not yet discovered twilight possessing sufficient girth as to conceal it utterly and lastingly. Not an instant is it without blossoms, and springtide upon it has not rested throughout whole ages. The pathways leading to eternity are constantly thronged with those arriving and those departing. There is no instant upon the earth, but is hallowed by the conversation of some soul or other with God. There is no change in the illumination of age-old day, but is perceived by some glance or other."

"The Beauty of the World"

"He who has succeeded in showing us a new line, some unsurmised perspective from the beauty of things and of the world, is our benefactor, sole and unforgettable. It seems to us as if he had belonged to us before our birth and throughout eternity had drawn near to us, finally to discover us amid this life, that he might tell us what he had to tell us. Through our whole life we are grateful to him, in accordance with a statute of love, which can forget nothing except what it has itself bestowed."

"The Beauty of the World"

"There, amid the depths of inner life, are the real losses and gains. There are the real battle-fields, unmarked upon maps, and

yet deciding the destiny of myriads. Every instant is a token either of victory or defeat in some portion of the earth, as every breath is somewhere accompanied by the first or last outcry of life. Souls are in a secret coherence; there are no whispered words. Each one, like the clash of bells at a time of conflagration resounds through all windows into all houses. Thoughts leave behind them the fiery traces of their flight, seen to a whole hemisphere. The state of mankind today is in sooth utterly different from the avowals of lips, the declarations in books and the beliefs of so many amongst us; the hours of the soul pass much more swiftly than the hours of reality; ethereal waves of spiritual mirrors are already reflecting other and serener ages than ours..."

"Multitudes"

"To the believer, all the destinies of myriads reveal a secret coherence. We do not grasp it, just as we do not grasp highest righteousness. We do not grasp it, since that part of history which is enacted in time and space is insignificant compared with what is enacted beyond time and space. And even within the visible part, there are a number of happenings whose arrival is too splendid and unforeseen to meet with vision strong enough to behold and preserve them for the future. Moreover, the history of the few centuries hitherto does not suffice to ascertain the statute directing the life of our planet, — a statute established for boundless ages."

"Multitudes"

"Mighty and love-radiant words have already soared many a time above our heads and left muteness of sorrow and trust within the souls of those who could hear them. Muteness of sorrow, since they saw how distant we still are from pure and potent life, and what conflagrations, sorrows and tempests yet await us. Muteness of hope,

since they knew that victory has always fallen to the share of those who comprehended the Highest Will, that in holy hands even withered twigs will blossom like lilies, and that glances of lovers speak a magical language which rules over souls and events."

"Multitudes"

"But always, in its every aspect, does beauty pursue its distant purpose, — to unite spirits with mighty visions of earth and reality richer than any reality of earth can be; like a shepherd's reed-pipe to entice the mystical flocks, scattered upon the hills, to loftier regions, to the more radiant, more fragrant, more healing pasture-lands of ancient mountain-ranges. In every victorious glance of our eyes is the joy of myriads who on our behalf subdued the world of colours and shapes, the sublime smile of blossoms and stars."

"Consecration of life"

"Like flames leaping above hidden treasures of earth, beauty acquaints us with the places where we have yet to seek . . . Its smile is like the great, perplexing smile of the ocean, perilous to the solitary voyager, and its message is as the mystical epistle of the universe, sealed by stars, and not opened even by the ethereal hand of the mightiest spirits, but which will one day be disclosed to all. Myriads of hearts beat in the service of beauty like weaver's shuttles upon the loom of life; myriads of hearts by myriads of beats in an unbroken working day crave to join together with wefts of love the fabric rended at the beginning of time. And vain is each heart-beat which has evaded its uniting labour, a shuttle with an interrupted thread, spiritual hands wearying to no avail."

"Consecration of Life"

"But as soon as things begin to lapse into chaos before our eyes, without statute or rhythm . . . it is a sign that we have strayed from

the path, and that we are passing into marshy places of decay, which will wait centuries for their vegetation, or perhaps will never achieve it during the span of time allotted to this earth. Like a damaged mirror, whence blind hands have stripped the silvery coating, nature loses the ability to reflect the features of our spiritual countenance. Perplexities and antagonisms, mutually rendering each other null and void, disclose to us the fact that there is a blemish upon our inner gaze. We have lost the vanishing point of the perspectives of beauty; something has happened which should not have happened; our relationship to life of the earth has become marred."

"Consecration of Life"

"But the labour which is performed by art is the same labour towards which all life of the earth is directed. It is a sequence to the creative toil which laid down stars as the foundation-stones of its building, and phantasy as a bridge between worlds visible and invisible. Thus art cannot be against life. Not even the art of the gruesome is against life, the art which animates the twilight places between day and night. For art, like life, is the sway of law over chaos."

"Consecration of Life"

"For in art are proclaimed the hitherto unembodied forms of life. But muteness is against life, even though it had squandered its strength through ages by a perpetual downpour of words, and though its stillness were the silence of whole libraries; blindness, even though it had dipped its brushes into all rosiness of the glowing sky, held back in the hollow of evening's hands, and let the sun trickle from them like drops of liquid gold; deafness, even though as a whirlwind it might toil in frenzy to play upon the gigantic keyboards of oceans. Muteness, blindness and deafness are

against life, because they disturb the coherence between beings, and thus mar the labour of spiritual union, the sense of beauty."

"Consecration of Life"

"Masters of knowledge belong here just as artists, as genuises of action and of the mind, conquerors and saints and all the countless ones who toil with them in common at the task of uniting spirits. All are led by beauty, ever escaping in cruel amorous play, ever pursued by phantasy. By that phantasy without which there has been no discovery upon earth, and whose ships have voyaged to the white headlands of new continents, centuries before the ships fashioned from iron and timber; phantasy which at the sight of springtide, hears the warbling of a myriad springtides, in the song of reapers the music of starry fields ripening, and in the beauty of women greets the love of radiant brotherly beings, ascending from the ages; phantasy which has moulded the conception of omnipotence in deep intuition of life's spiritual basis, and which in gratitude for a moment's ecstatic view of its goal, illumines the whole cosmos as a smile, forgets the age-long wounds of hearts, forgets death which the living cannot dare to love, even though it unites more than life does."

"Consecration of Life"

"Like all sublime endeavour of man, art also is accompanied by jealousy of hidden powers, hostile to the spirit. Even starladen glances of beauty hinder man by their radiance, and can hypnotise the weak into slumber, amid which his labour sinks from his hands. He who creates has need of a struggle, a movement of the spirit, the surging of a spring that thrusts itself upward from the depths. It is needful that by toil he should develop girth and a strongly arched breast, which bestows depth and calm upon the rhythm of

his breathing for his ascent and amid perils. So the hands of geniuses goldenly tanned by eternal sun, had to be hardened by toil, in order to possess the power of always mowing a complete circle of the horizon with one sweep of the scythe, and to govern time like a waggon, seized by the rim of the wheel, and held back until their brethren had finished loading the sheaves."

"Perilous Harvests"

"For even the labour of earth, the coarsest and the humblest, in which man and beast advance side by side amid the loop of a single sweltering breath, possesses its lineament of pathos, its sheen of grievous glory, ecstasy of self-oblivion, its entrancement at the gust which mingles the spiritual breath of myriads; its brow throbs with a gigantic pulse like the resonance of anvils upon which worlds are being shattered and moulded, and it has its own dream of omnipotence. Even from the uncouthest of features, jaded with toil, glitters, as from twisted prison-bars, the radiance of the soul, which was present at the construction of planets, and now suffers in captivity."

"Perilous Harvests"

"Toil, with grievous heroism stands meekly upon guard against death, hunger and the blindness of the elements, from age to age preserving the growth of humankind for its secret purpose, and ever more deeply initiating it into comprehension of earth. A myriad countenances tragically wither, that they may waft their bloom into a single countenance, a myriad limbs are rended, that they may give a dazing emanation to the lines of a single body, glow to a single song . . . Is it possible to forget that at every step you take upon the track through the ages, myriads sink down with exhaustion?"

"Perilous Harvests"

"Lo, the hand whose omnipotence you marvel at, before whose labour you wax in superhuman exaltation, in brotherhood of higher beings, this hand has passed in humility through a myriad centuries of transformation; through the ages it has learnt to struggle with soil, stone, timber and metals, and to weld them imperiously in their essence, before their amazing structure was developed and their sinews were fashioned. Scourged by fire, it was rendered sensitive as the hands of the sightless, and become spiritual, it is now extended over the earth, and like the upraised signs of a script for the sightless it reads its annals from nodes of rocks and from motion of glaciers, and uplifts itself to the script of golden points on the vaultage of the heavens. The gesture of reapers and sowers has given it that liveness, which in art seizes on the movement of trees in the wind, the frosty quivering of waters, the flight of birds, of radiances, of thoughts and of stars. The concentrated power of multitudes which is quickened amid it, gives it a magical sway over multitudes; and with kingly movement it even appeases the tempest of rhythms and the perilous surging of spirits."

"Perilous Harvests"

"With what daring and kingly foresight will the paths be trodden by these pioneers, despatched before nations to the promised land! How great will be the certitude of their eyes and hands, to seize the images of gigantic landscapes, which slumbered age-long in a splendid calm of radiance, and are to become the dwelling of lovers! What eagle vehemence will be needful for their thoughts, before they fling themselves upon their prey, which soars the whole visible horizon in the flash of a single instant! With what anxious intentness will they keep watch amid the frosts of night, that they may not miss the sign of the prophetic constellation! With what purity will they approach the festivals of their lives, the secret

name-days of their souls, in order not to forfeit the creative serenity of grace, which approaches only in chosen hours, and once forfeited will never return ! For that, which the ear of the elect has failed to seize at its appointed hour, will vainly be coveted by ages and nations."

"Perilous Harvests"

"Blissful, fateful and ruthless as life is the sabbath play of creative powers, the voluptuous dance to the music of springtides and stars, litheness of winds, which from clouds build up palaces of gigantic architecture, and cement their marble with the golden mortar of the sun. For with a tremor we forebode that every radiant sabbath was preceded by six shackled days, that the rapture of the dance is followed by a lassitude as from distant journeys, that the wind which upraised cities from clouds, has the strength, and if lowered to the earth, to lay waste whole regions and to overturn ancient forests."

"Perilous Harvests"

"The mighty would tremble if they beheld the chart of our planet as it reveals itself to ecstatic glances of love. It would be a vain task to seek thereon the frontiers of kingdoms and circuits of languages ; from the heights, from which can be seen the architecture of continents and the coherence of islands in green mirrors of oceans, the white stones, set down as boundary marks of fields and vineyards, are no longer visible. The whole expanse of the earth, with its tropical bloom of rapture and perception, would be revealed to them as one of the smallest of spiritual cities, from which paths lead to all visible and invisible realms of the universe, to each dizzy spiritual metropolis, whose image cannot be dreamt by dream of man. The highest glaciers of human thought, still glowing between heaven and earth, when night has already blotted out the region whence they simmered over, tower up in their golden chillness to

the stars of another firmament like a number of points on a triangle from which it is possible to measure only a trifling segment of the dazzling expanses of spiritual realms. And yet merely the aspect of these azure distances, where all stars of the visible cosmos tremble like a golden morning cloud, which is merging with the sun, strengthens our vision and teaches it to gauge the height and weight of terrestrial things. Before the aspect of these promised and inaccessible kingdoms, the children of the earth nestle together in a feeling of inner brotherhood, which gives them hopes in common, and will give them one harvest of earth in common, riches of fields and gardens."

"Aims"

"Among those multitudes condemned to toil and hunger, there perish perhaps silenced singers who could have set their brethren's hearts astir with rapture of immortality, and in gardens of dream, where all echoes still recall the victorious chant of spirits at the creation of worlds, they could have plucked roses for the paths of lovers and conquerors. In subterranean darknesses there are perhaps eyes growing blind, which were created that they might behold the most secret smiles of beauty and the signs given us by dwellers upon sister earths; perhaps the hands of betrayed princes are being maimed, which alone could have dared to open the treasure houses of their kindred, the secret granaries of age-long harvests, closed up by jealous years, and amid assuagement of fervour to hearken to some of the magical words from earth's monologue, when in her workshops she sets element beside element, and prepares the faery of her springtides for the marriage festivals of queens."

"Aims"

"In the fire of our every instant are encountered the same powers which enkindled the myriad suns of the milky way, which with

billows of radiance rolled the seed of life from star to star, and our oceans throb with the same quivering of motherhood as when they felt in their depths the first pregnant stir of new beings. Lightly as a dulcet wind there drifts through all creation the same breath which shook the lost tertiary herbage, aroused unnumbered kindred of animals and sent them forth as the spirit's vanguard from hot forests of an ancient spring-tide." "The Present Age"

"Equally astounding today as ages ago is the art possessed by waters and suns in shaping of earths, equally alert the life of crystals and metals, equally harmonious the rhythm pulsing amid workshops of matter, which know not sabbaths and repose. String after string bursts upon the secret implement with which life plays its song of bliss and torment of countless beings, but the remaining strings assume the whole bequest of those rended, the whole compass of their intervals, and ever bolder and severer, more perilous and complex is the playing, an ever greater skill is needed to maintain the original lofty poise of vital ardour, ever more spiritual and baffling are the variations on one and the same theme, developing through the ages." "The Present Age"

"What an apparition, at which the breath is bated, to behold a countenance harmonised by the gentle life of higher mortals, a smile purchased with victorious days and victorious nights, and a glance out of which a dazzling inner universe blazes with unwavering certainty from places where death is not. No epoch was without these instinctive fulfillers of a statute, who were teachers by the mere fact of having existed, by the unbounded haleness of their being, by the involuntary greatness of their every manifestation, even the simplest, and in whose nearness all things showed themselves to be good, happiness attainable, destiny kind, as if their every gesture

evoked and controlled a spirit music inaudible to the hearing, perceptible to an enraptured heart."

"The Present Age"

"It is by an optical delusion of the spirit that precisely the magnificence of present time eludes us. Never was the hallucination of immensity, the kingly expansion of the spirit for the encompassing of all things, mightier than in the marvellous days in which we live. Where are dreamings of bygone man, who created a right to his own enclosed garden, to his happiness anxiously guarded even beyond the grave, and who established rampart, dense forest, waters, multitude of slaves, terror and death as a guard, in order to bestow safety upon his kindred? The man, whose nearness we surmise in the trembling of our hearts, in a sudden, unfamiliar ring in our voices, in kisses of a beloved woman, in unrest of our ponderings, that it seems to us as if all clouds upon our horizon were pillars of dust rising along his march, the powerful and brotherly man of tomorrow is already today spreading the frontiers of realms in our dreams, and he is taking earth as his boundless garden, hedged in by the heavens, with all its continents and islands, flung like baskets of flowers upon waves of the oceans. Nations toiling upon both hemispheres alternate at his labour like pitmen toiling day and night by turns and descending to a single floor of the mines. In the dreams of his architect-creators arise whole cities, fashioned in a single creative gesture, in a single victorious casting of shapes, a gigantic crystallisation in accordance with a single statute of number, bloom of matter in accordance with a single statute of growth."

"The Present Age"

"We feel that the day of judgment is not in the future, but is uninterruptedly present in the universe. That each hour judges over all hours, each of us against his will is the executor of justice in

lives of mortals, the woman in the life of man, the man in the destiny of woman, and in the destiny of both the child which, a mysterious guest, has come and sat down at their table, even the one which shunned their house . . . " "The Present Age"

It will be seen from this series of extracts that Březina's prose is by no means uniform in texture, revealing, as it does, the same subtle gradations as his poetry. Together with sentences which are metallic in the quality of their verbal resonance, there are passages of a rare crystalline delicacy. But the variety of harmonic effects which he produces must be listened for with the same intentness as is needed to track the course of his ideas.

VI

In the foregoing survey an endeavour has been made to indicate the leading features of Březina's diction, the general tendencies of his ideas, and the path of his development as thinker and artist. For this purpose, a number of quotations have been given, but there are certain aspects of Březina's work which cannot be derived from isolated extracts, however representative they may be. Thus, in order to appreciate the architectural qualities of his longer poems with their symphonic modulations, they must be read as a connected whole. And it is only by this process also that their visionary atmosphere can be adequately felt. The following lines: —

"As a sleep-walker lured from his bed, pallid, fettered and dumb
My dream do I follow, and me an Unknown's promptings benumb."

form a significant commentary to much of Březina's writing, which produces the impression of being a transcript of visions, the records

of a somnabulist's wanderings beyond earthly spheres. It is hardly surprising if the human gaze wavers and flinches in the effort to retain its focus upon the immensity of these vistas, if the resources of human speech sometimes appear unequal to the task imposed upon them. Here too, a reference should be made to the important fact that Březina cannot be presented to English readers in his native language. It is perhaps a testimony to his poetical calibre that so much of his individual accent survives the ordeal of translation. His subject-matter, the main features of his symbolistic diction, and the less elusive of his musical and metrical devices can be approximately reproduced in another language. Word-associations of a subtler type cannot, of course, be preserved. Still less is it possible, especially through the medium of an analytic language such as English, to convey the syntactical effects which are derived from the resources of a highly inflected language such as Czech. The closely-knit fabric of the original tends to yield a diffuser texture when obtrusive prepositions have to be substituted for case-endings, and there are analogous difficulties with other parts of speech. The resulting detriment to the verbal economy of the original may, with care, be reduced to a minimum. But the English translation must fall short in attempting the impressively oracular effects which the organic structure of Březina's native language enables him to attain.

Thus, the peculiar genius of the Czech language is an essential factor in Březina's artistic achievement. This should be emphasised, for in certain phases he superficially resembles Whitman and Maeterlinck, and it is quite possible that he has been influenced by their work. But in other respects, Březina's divergencies from these writers are more striking and fundamental than his similarities to them. He himself has insisted upon the ancestral influences which have helped to shape his mentality, and these influences are strongly racial in character. Březina's leanings towards mysticism, speculative

philosophy and ethical reform show him to be in the direct line with such men as Thomas of Štitný (Štitný is quite close to Březina's birthplace), Peter Chelčický and Komenský (Comenius), while his altruistic ideals are prompted by the same fervid spirit which made the Hussites so formidable. In the region where he was born and has spent his life, the traditions of the pietistic sects, the humanism of the Taborite brotherhood have lingered on into recent times. Hence Březina's work combines remarkable extremes of the primitive and the modern. He displays a sense of familiarity with occult things, and yet discovers a source of wonder in the common aspects of life. But what is modern in Březina is on the surface, and even so it is not unduly prominent. Internal evidence alone could assign a date to only a small fraction of his writing.

The peculiar cast of Březina's mind then, which is so typically expressed in his choice and grouping of words, in the rhythms of his sentences, and in the direction of his ideas, is to be explained as a product of ancestral and racial factors. Moreover, the seclusion of his life, from which the dictates of materialism have been altogether eliminated, is entirely in keeping with his own doctrines. It is, indeed, his non-acceptance of current values which makes his true greatness difficult to gauge immediately. But seen in its proper perspective, his work acquires consistency, and its parts, which, in detachment, do not always convey their full message, assume their due proportions in a rational and cohesive structure. For he may appropriately be described as one of those who, to apply his own imagery, "... hearken to magical words from earth's monologue, when in her workshops she sets element beside element, and prepares the faery of her springtides for the marriage-festivals of queens."

PRINTED BY F. OBZINA,
VYŠKOV CZECHOSLOVAKIA

UTL AT DOWNSVIEW



D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C
39 09 13 03 05 021 9